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Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence of Colonial Countries and Peoples

Dissemination of information on decolonization during the period from July 1998 to May 1999

Report of the Department of Public Information

I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-third session, the General Assembly, in paragraph 3 of its resolution 53/69 on dissemination of information on decolonization, requested the Department of Public Information to take measures through all the media available, including publications, radio and television, as well as the Internet, to give publicity to the work of the United Nations in the field of decolonization. The present report covers the activities undertaken by the Department of Public Information during the period July 1998 to May 1999.

2. The Department's public information activities covered a wide range of issues pertaining to decolonization. The Department continued to provide coverage of the work of the General Assembly and the Special Committee on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (Special Committee of 24 on Decolonization). It also continued to promote the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism (1990–2000) and the Regional Seminar on Non-Self-Governing Territories through the means available to it as well as through the mass media. The Department dispatched an Information Officer to East Timor to assess the needs of the public information campaign for popular consultation on the autonomy plan, and actively participated in the preparations for the establishment of the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET), particularly its information component.

II. Press

3. The Department issued a total of 61 press releases in English and French on issues relating to decolonization, as part of its regular coverage of United Nations activities. These included press releases relating to the work of the Special Committee on Decolonization and the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) of the General Assembly. All the press releases were made available to the media at United Nations Headquarters and distributed electronically to the United Nations information centres and services worldwide, and were posted on the United Nations home page, which has become one of the most effective means of dissemination of information.

4. The Secretary-General's statements, including his statement to the Special Committee of 24 and his message for the Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of All Non-Self-Governing Territories Fighting for Freedom, Independence and Human Rights, 24–27 May 1999, were highlighted to the press through the Spokesman for the Secretary-General in his daily press briefing and through the Department's *Daily Highlights* as well as on the Internet.

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5. The Department assigned a Press Officer to cover the Caribbean Regional Seminar of the Special Committee of 24 on Non-Self-Governing Territories, which was held at Castries, Saint Lucia, from 25 to 27 May 1999, within the framework of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism (1990–2000). Press releases were made available to the local and regional media representatives in Saint Lucia, and were also issued at United Nations Headquarters and put on the Internet. Information folders, each containing several background materials on decolonization, were prepared for the participants of the Seminar.

6. The United Nations home page now contains 1,815 documents in English on issues relating to decolonization, ranging from the Secretary-General's reports to the working papers of the Special Committee of 24. A separate Web page on decolonization has been designed for the United Nations home page, and will be available under the "Peace and security" section shortly.

III. Publications

7. The *UN Chronicle*, a quarterly magazine of the United Nations, featured in its issue No. 4 (1998) an article on the Pacific Regional Seminar on Non-Self-Governing Territories, which was held at Nadi, Fiji, from 16 to 18 June 1998. The article highlighted the Seminar's conclusions and recommendations. A summary of the work of the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly during its fifty-third session, which included a section on decolonization, was published in the *Chronicle*, No. 1 (1999).

8. During the reporting period, a comprehensive account of decolonization issues for the year 1996 was prepared for publication in the regular edition of the *Yearbook of the United Nations* (21 pages). The 1997 edition, as well as the forthcoming backlog edition for the year 1990 to be published in June 1999 (39 pages), will also comprehensively cover decolonization issues for those years.

IV. Radio and Central News Service

9. The Radio and Central News Service of the Department continued, during the reporting period, to cover various aspects of decolonization and related issues in its radio news bulletins and current affairs magazines in both official and non-official languages. The radio news programmes filed reports, among other things, on the work of the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly and of the Special Committee of 24, the question of Western Sahara, the election board in the United States Virgin Islands, and the plight of the people in the Non-Self-Governing Territory of Montserrat. The various stages of the United Nations-sponsored negotiations on East Timor were covered extensively in daily and weekly news programmes. These included the press conferences by Ambassador Jamsheed Marker, Personal Representative of the Secretary-General on East Timor; the Secretary-General's call for an end to violence in East Timor; the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia and Portugal with the Secretary-General at United Nations Headquarters; and the signing of the agreements on East Timor on 5 May. The press conference on East Timor held by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was also reported.

10. In addition, the Service produced nine feature and regional magazine programmes concerning decolonization and related issues in various languages. The two regional magazine features were entitled: "After 15 years of stop-and-go negotiations, is there light at the end of the tunnel for East Timor?" (*UN Calling Asia*, No. 8/99); and "Election officials establish a global network: Chairman of the Joint Boards of Elections in the US Virgin Islands says the election boards have greater responsibility to voters than governments" (*UN Caribbean Magazine*, No. 17/99). The Features are: "Caribbean Calypsonians bring hope to the people of Montserrat, the Non-Self-Governing Territory in the UK Virgin Islands" (*Caribbean Echo*, No. 10/98); "Independence or integration: Deciding the future of Western Sahara" (*Perspective*, No. 27/98); "Voices of East Timorese Activists" (*As NU em Acca*, No. 14/99); "East Timor: Autonomy or independence" (*As NU em Acca*, No. 8/99); "Indonesia and Portugal remove obstacles to an autonomy plan for East Timor" (*UN Calling Asia*, No. 8/99); "Perspective for Peace in East Timor: Part 1" (*Perspective*, No. 15/99); and "Perspective ... Part 2" (*Perspective*, No. 16/99).

11. The Caribbean Regional Programme of the Radio Service also produced radio news magazines and features on the Caribbean Regional Seminar on Non-Self-Governing Territories and this year's observance of the Week of Solidarity in Saint Lucia.

V. Television/video

12. Activities within the United Nations system related to decolonization continued to be televised and disseminated through feeds and dubs made available to networks and other television stations, and through packages of television news

and video highlights provided to news syndicators. The Audio/Visual Library continued to make tapes and cassettes available to correspondents, delegates, United Nations radio producers and outside producers on decolonization issues.

13. The United Nations video entitled "About the United Nations: decolonization", which was produced by the Department, was shown at the Caribbean Regional Seminar as well as at United Nations Headquarters in observance of the Week of Solidarity.

VI. United Nations information centres

14. United Nations information centres and services around the world continued to disseminate information on decolonization as part of the mandate to promote a better understanding of the role and functions of the United Nations in their respective countries and regions. Information centre directors and national information officers covered the issues of decolonization in speaking engagements, focusing on the historic process of decolonization and the vital role played by the United Nations in it. The Director of the United Nations Information Centre at Jakarta, for example, was a keynote speaker and a member of a panel in a workshop for university lecturers on the theme "The right of peoples to self-determination", held at Trisakti University, while the United Nations Information Centre at Sana'a translated and disseminated the Secretary-General's statement to the meeting of the Decolonization Committee.

VII. NGOs/public inquiries

15. The Department continued to disseminate information on decolonization through non-governmental organization briefings and guided tours, as well as by responding to inquiries from the public. The Director of the Asia and the Pacific Division and a Senior Political Affairs Officer of the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs briefed NGOs on the role of the United Nations in East Timor in the context of the 5 May 1999 agreements. The Chairman of the Special Committee of 24 was invited to brief NGOs on the outcome of the Caribbean Regional Seminar on Non-Self-Governing Territories and to give them a preview of the upcoming annual session of the Committee on decolonization. The guided tour route includes a visit to the Trusteeship Council Chamber, where the role of the United Nations in the process of decolonization is explained. Some 431,241 visitors took guided tours in 1998. The Public Inquiries Unit responded to a total of 100 inquiries from the public on questions relating to decolonization during the reporting period.